



STEELE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION AGENDA

Administration Center - 630 Florence Avenue – Owatonna, MN 55060

Steele County's Mission:

Driven to deliver quality services in a respectful and fiscally responsible way.

MONDAY, MAY 25, 2021 AT 4:00 PM

County Boardroom, Steele County Administration Center

Due to the current emergency declarations and guidance about limiting person-to-person contact due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, in person attendance at all meetings of the of the Steele County Board of Commissioners will be suspended till further notice in accordance with the Minnesota Statute 13D.021. Attendance to meetings by Telephone or Other Electronic means are available. Contact the Administration Center at 507-444-7400 or visit the Steele County Website at www.steele.mn.us for additional information.

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Agenda Approval /Additions
3. Review Telecommuting Policy
4. Detention Center Update
5. Set next Board Work Session
6. Other Items

Adjourn

Disclaimer: This agenda has been prepared to provide information regarding an upcoming meeting of the Steele County Board of Commissioners. This document does not claim to be complete and is subject to change.



Steele County Agenda Item

Subject: Updated Telecommuting Policy

Department: Administrator's Office

Committee Meeting Date: May 25, 2021

Board Meeting Date: May 25, 2021

Consent Agenda: Yes No

Resolution: Yes No

Policy Committee Recommendation:

Recommendation:

Recommend approval of updated Telecommuting Policy

Background (Including Budget Impact):

The proposed updated Telecommuting Policy was discussed at the May 11th Board meeting. At that meeting it was requested that we do a preliminary survey of departments to see approximately how many employees might telecommute, if an updated policy was adopted. The survey revealed that approximately 37 employees might utilize a telecommuting work arrangement with most of those being a hybrid type arrangement vs. a fully remote one. Please note that this survey data is preliminary, as none of these telecommuting arrangements have been fully vetted by Administration.

The Steele County Board adopted a Telecommuting Policy in 2012 and then an interim COVID policy in 2020. We think it's important to update the Telecommuting Policy as a result of the following factors:

- **Covid-19 Health Pandemic** – The Covid-19 pandemic over the past year demonstrated that County work can be successfully completed in a telecommuting (remote) capacity. An Interim Teleworking Policy was developed and adopted to address our need for remote work on a temporary, shorter-term basis. As we look to transition out of the temporary situation, a longer-term solution is necessary than our Interim Policy can provide.
- **Updates Needed to Original Policy** – The original Telecommuting Policy is nearly 10 years old with numerous components no longer applicable. In order to effectively plan for our future workforce and workplace needs, an updated and more detailed Telecommuting Policy is important to have in place.
- **Strategic Plan Implementation** – One of the priority areas in the County's Strategic Plan under the Workplace/Workforce section is the recruitment and retention of employees. Policies governing flexible workplace locations and schedules are very important to the success of recruitment and

retention of employees. This policy will be very beneficial internally in evaluating whether a position/work could be completed in a remote manner in some capacity.

- **Current Recruitment and Retention Efforts** – Recent recruitment/retention efforts have accentuated the need to look at a more permanent telecommuting policy, as applicants and existing employees are seeking employers who provide a telecommuting work option.

Attachments: Updated Telecommuting Policy

Steele County Telecommuting Policy

Purpose of Policy. In an effort to achieve the following benefits, Steele County sets forth a policy to define telecommuting, to guide decisions about appropriate telecommuting arrangements, and to clarify employee and Steele County responsibilities and obligations when a telecommuting agreement is in place.

Benefits of Telecommuting. For Steele County, these may include:

- Improved employee recruitment and retention
- Improved employee morale and greater job satisfaction
- Reduced absenteeism
- Increased employee productivity
- Improved customer service through ability to focus on work
- Reduced travel time and costs
- Reduced worksite space, parking, and related overhead costs
- Reduced environmental impacts
- Improved disaster recovery and contingency strategy where dispersed workforce is advantageous

Definitions

Telecommuting: For the purposes of this policy, telecommuting is a voluntary arrangement, supported by a telecommuting agreement, between Steele County and the employee to conduct their work in a designated offsite workspace, most often the employee's home, on a regular basis. Telecommuting is neither a benefit nor a right, but instead is a privilege and may be discontinued at the discretion of Steele County when it is determined to not be in the best interest of the County. Telecommuting does not change the basic terms and conditions of employment.

Other arrangements whereby an employee works at a location other than their normal Steele County worksite (such as visiting clients or attending meetings or training off site) or an employee is authorized by a supervisor to work at home for the purposes of completing a specific project or other brief and time-limited arrangements, are not governed by this policy.

Long-term Telecommuting: Telecommuting approved as a long-term arrangement that occurs on a consistent, ongoing schedule with no end date, although required to be renewed annually.

Temporary Telecommuting: Telecommuting that occurs on a consistent schedule that is approved for a time-limited duration.

Telecommuting Worksite: The designated offsite workspace in which the employee will regularly work.

Steele County Property: Supplies, equipment, data or documents provided by Steele County or produced by a Steele County employee, client, or other party related to Steele County business.

Telecommuting Performance Expectations and Standards

- **Expectations of Telecommuters.** Telecommuters will at all times be cognizant of the public's expectations for productive, dedicated, and faithful service from all County employees. Both actual and apparent conflicts with this expectation must be avoided and the existence of any such conflicts will result in termination of the telecommute arrangement and/or disciplinary action.
- **Performance Standards.** Performance standards for teleworkers are no less than those of employees working in a County office doing the same work. If modifications to the standards are necessary, they must be discussed with and agreed to by the supervisor.
- **Performance Expectations.** The telecommuter is expected to be at least as productive, if not more so, than an employee who regularly works at a Steele County worksite.

- Policy Compliance. The telecommuter must comply with all Steele County policies. Failure to comply may result in revocation of the telecommuting agreement and/or other appropriate disciplinary action.

Minimum Criteria For Consideration of Telecommuting Arrangement. The success of a telecommuting arrangement is dependent upon the characteristics of the job, the employee, the employee's home technology, and the supervisor all being well-suited for such an arrangement.

Job Minimum Requirements. To be considered for a telecommuting arrangement, the employee's job must consist of duties that can be fulfilled while telecommuting, including the following:

- Needs of the department continue to be met.
- Customer/client service does not decrease.
- Duties can be fulfilled within the telecommuting structure.

Employee Minimum Requirements. To be considered for a telecommuting arrangement, the employee must meet the following minimum requirements:

- Be employed with Steele County for a minimum of 6 months of continuous employment and have successfully completed probationary period for the position. Any exception to this requirement may be considered, with final approval by the County Administrator.
- Be in compliance with Steele County policies.
- Meet or exceed expectations of their job.

Technology Minimum Requirements. To be considered for a telecommuting arrangement, the employee's proposed telecommuting worksite technology must meet the following minimum requirements:

- Minimum internet connection speed of 5 Mb per second.
- Internet connection by DSL (digital subscriber line), cable or fiber. Satellite based solutions do not have sufficient performance and reliability to be used at this time. Fixed wireless access through an ISP (Internet Service Provider) **MAY** meet this minimum requirement. The employee's supervisor in consultation with Steele County's Information Technology department can review the solution for reliability and performance to determine whether the Internet connection negatively impacts the employee's ability to do their job.

Employee's Technology Minimum Requirements. To be considered for a telecommuting arrangement, the employee must meet the following minimum requirements:

- Have the ability to solve basic hardware and software problems.
- Have a clear understanding of their intended telecommuting worksite network set-up and how to connect Steele County equipment to it, including:
 - Location of their home router and how to connect to it
 - Location of the Ethernet cable and the USB (universal serial bus) cable port and any other necessary ports, etc., as required
- Have read and acknowledged understanding of the remote access documents provided by the Steele County Information Technology (IT) department, specifically the guides on:
 - Connecting to the Steele County network using VPN (virtual private network)
 - Signing back into Microsoft Outlook, Microsoft Teams, and VPN after changing your password
- Have in place an approved [Steele County Remote Access User Agreement](#) at the time of the approval of the *Telecommuting Agreement*.

Worksite Minimum Requirements. In addition, the telecommuter's worksite must be established in a manner that enables the employee to:

- Work uninterrupted.

- Secure Steele County property for use only for County business.
- Secure non-public, protected, and sensitive data from **sight** and **sound** by other parties in compliance with federal, state, and local requirements.

Additional Factors Considered. When ascertaining whether a telecommuting arrangement is likely to be successful, the following additional factors will be considered:

- The needs of the employee's work team and department
- Team responsibilities
- Cost effectiveness and budget
- Employee's work skills, including organizational, time management, self-motivation, reliability, and ability to work independently
- Impact of telecommuting on the work of other employees
 - Telecommuters may require different in-office support (such as printing and mailing documents, checking and triaging physical mail). Such support may be made available, as determined by the employee's supervisor, only to the degree that it is not less efficient for Steele County in the aggregate as a result. It is important that explicit arrangements be made related to this as part of establishing the telecommuting arrangement.
- Telecommuting work location in determining an employee's ability to meet the requirements of the job.
- Any other prevailing conditions identified by the supervisor and/or department head.

Seniority is not a factor in determining eligibility to telecommute.

The final decision whether to approve a Telecommuting Request/Application will be the County Administrator, after consultation with the supervisor and/or department head.

Telecommuting Agreement Requirements. In addition to continuing to meet the minimum requirements for consideration of a telecommuting arrangement that are identified above, the *Steele County Telecommuting Agreement* contains additional requirements that will apply.

Compensation For Telecommuter Travel Time.

Commuting. An employee shall not be compensated for time commuting between a Steele County worksite and their telecommuting worksite.

Compensation For Mileage. Compensation for mileage shall be made in accordance with the [Employee Expense and Mileage Reimbursement Policy](#).

Length of Agreement and Periodic Review; Termination.

Telecommuting Trial Period. Each new telecommuting agreement is subject to a trial period of up to 90 days.

Review During Trial Period. Evaluation of telecommuter performance during the trial period will include regular interaction by phone, videoconference and email between the supervisor and telecommuter to discuss work progress and challenges. During the trial period, the employee and supervisor will each evaluate the arrangement and its effectiveness, making recommendations for continuing, continuing with modifications, or terminating the telecommuting agreement, with the final determination being made by Steele County.

Annual Review of Telecommuting Agreement. Each telecommuting agreement will be evaluated annually at the time of the employee's regular performance review with continued suitability to be documented as part of the review. At this time, the employee's supervisor shall also consult with Steele County's IT department

concerning the employee's ability to meet the minimum technology requirements including consideration of the employee's volume and type of IT help desk tickets.

This does not preclude more frequent review and evaluation if the situation merits.

Termination of Agreement During Trial Period. At any time during the trial period, the telecommuting agreement may be terminated by Steele County or the employee with a one-week notice.

Employee Termination of Telecommuting Agreement. An employee may terminate their telecommuting agreement and return to a traditional work arrangement upon 30-days written notice to the supervisor and upon the availability of office space at the Steele County worksite, unless a shorter period is mutually agreed upon.

The notice should include the date the employee intends to terminate the agreement and reason for doing so.

Employer Termination of Telecommuting Agreement. Telecommuting may be discontinued by Steele County at any time. When practical, the County shall provide a two-calendar-week advance notice of their intent to terminate the agreement. Reasons for termination of the telecommuting agreement may include, but are not limited to:

- Non-compliance with the telecommuting agreement. This may result in immediate termination of the agreement.
- Declining work performance.
- Changes in organizational needs.
- Factors outside the control of Steele County, including but not limited to changes in caseload, changes in program requirements, a change or decrease in funding.

Policy approval:

Author(s):	Administration/IT/HR/Administration
Reviewed by:	
Internal Central Services	05/05/21
Reviewed and Approved by:	
Board of Commissioners	

Revision history:	2012	(Original Adoption 02/14/12)
		(Revised 03/04/12)
	2021	(Revised 05/2021)



County Telecommuting Data (Post-Covid)

Counties Offering Telecommuting

Carver
 Hennepin
 Sherburne
 Goodhue
 Mille Lacs
 Freeborn
 Cottonwood
 Waseca
 Dodge
 Blue Earth
 Winona
 Lyon
 Cass
 Ottertail
 Rice
 Fillmore
 Big Stone
 Mower
 Kittson
 Olmsted

Counties Not Offering Telecommuting

Redwood

Counties Researching Telecommuting

Nobles
 Clay
 Polk
 Becker

Most Common Formats:

Hybrid (combination of in-office & working from home) and some are fully remote

Most Common Positions:

Nurses, Attorneys, Probation Officers, Appraisers, IT, HR, Finance, Emergency Management, Building Inspectors and Officials, Social Workers and Case Managers